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THE ARGONAUTICA AND LINEAR B TEXTS

It is commonly admitted that the Mycenaean texts are mostly economic reports and because of their specific character, do not include clear and direct information on the contacts between the Mycenaean world and the states of the East.

The indirect information can conventionally be split into two groups:

Lexical borrowings;

Place names and ethnonyms.

The second group can itself be divided into two sub-groups:

The names reflecting the origin of an individual or a group of individuals, and the ones attested in proper names or adjectives.

Along with the archeological finds, linguistic material is very important for the study of the Argonautica, which in fact refers to the Hellenic and Colchian or Aegean and Caucasian contacts. Since both sides are highlighted at the present conference, I will confine myself solely to the hypothetical mentioning of Colchis in the Linear B texts.

Admittedly, Colchis is mentioned in Assyrian, Urartian and Greek written records. Moreover, apart from being an actual country, Colchis is a mythological setting in classical Greece. After the Linear B texts were read, it was suggested that Colchis was known to Greeks as early as the Mycenaean period. The assumption is based on the name ko-ki-da, ko-ki-de-jo found in three texts from the Knossus archive (ko-ki-da: KN Sd 4403, 4430, ko-ki-de-jo: KN Fh 5465). Some scholars read the word as Κολχίδας, Κολχίδειος. However, this is not the only possible version.¹ In fact, peculiarities of

¹ Diccionario Griego-Español. Anejo I. Diccionario micénico, I-II, Redactado por F. Aura Jorro, Bajo la dirección F. R. Adrados, Madrid 1985-1993 (DMic), I, 372sq.

Mycenaean writing allow several ways of reading. Only open syllables were graphically represented (vowel, consonant + vowel, rarely – consonant + consonant + vowel). The final consonant of the closed syllable (a vowel + a consonant or a consonant + a vowel + a consonant) was not normally recorded. The lack of the final consonant (ν , ς) rendered ambiguous the case form and gender of the word. Besides, the written language does not distinguish between γ - κ - χ consonants, which very often make it rather difficult to identify a particular word.

Let us consider the texts that include the word of our immediate interest:

KN Sd 4403 :] e-re-pa-te-jo , o-po-qo , ke-ra-ja-pi , o-pi-i-ja-pi 'ko-ki-da , o-pa' CUR 3// i-]qi-ja , / a-ja-me-na , e-re-pa-te , a-ra-ro-mo-te-me-na , a-ra-ru-ja [

"3 horse-chariots without wheels inlaid with ivory, fully assembled, equipped with bridles with cheek-straps decorated with ivory and horn, produced by ko-ki-da."²

KN So 4430: ko-ki-da , o-pa ne-wa // e-ri-ka , / o-da-twe-ta , a-ro₂-a ROTA ZE 22 MO ROTA 1

"produced by ko-ki-da: new, toothed wheels of willow, of superior quality."³

KN Fh 5465: ko-ki-de-jo qa[

Only one word is fully preserved in this fragment.

It is absolutely clear that the word of our interest is used here in the genitive. In the first two texts, the word can be interpreted as either the nominative or the genitive case form.

To understand the texts, it is essential to find out the meaning of the term o-pa. Part of scholars considers it to be a state, feudal duty, while others interpret it as an enterprise or a workshop.⁴ J. T. Killen, who as far as I know, is the author of the latest work on the term, agrees with M. Lejeune and J. L. Melena that the term corresponds to an ancient Greek word /hopā/ (nomen actionis derived from the same root as ἔπω); however he offers a different interpretation of the term and suggests that it used to denote the final stage of working a product.⁵ Therefore, I find it acceptable to translate the

² Cf. M. Ventris, J. Chadwick, Documents in Mycenaean Greek, Cambridge 1973², 365ff.

³ Cf. J. T. Hooker, Linear B. An Introduction, Bristol 1983², 164f.

⁴ *DMic* II, 30sq.

⁵ J. T. Killen, Mycenaean o-pa. Floreant Studia Mycenaea, Akten des X. internationalen mykenologischen Colloquiums in Salzburg vom 1.-5. Mai 1995, hrsg. v. S. Deger-Jalkotzy, St. Hiller, O. Panagl, Wien 1999, 325ff.

term as ‘produced by ko-ki-da’ although, it should not be ruled out that in the given context the word could have been used in a specific technical sense.⁶

We learn from the texts that ko-ki-da was somehow connected with the production of expensive articles – richly decorated war chariots for the court.

The dating of the Knossos archive is disputable. Arthur Evans was the first to date the texts discovered on Crete back to the 1400 B.C. Following the 1950s, linguistic parallels with other archives caused the popularity of another version (1200). Archeological or textological studies of the latest decade seem to testify again in favour of the outset of the 14th century.⁷ Is it possible that a man either coming from Colchis or called Colchian could have served for the royal palace on Crete in the 14th century B.C.?

In my opinion, such a hypothesis should not be ruled out.

The first argument to mention is the lexical parallels between pre-Greek and Kartvelian environments, which have been highlighted several times in special literature. One of those words to be necessarily mentioned at the conference on the Argonautica is the well-known ko-wo (κῶφος, κῶας) ‘skin, fleece’ found in one of the Mycenaean texts.

Those linguistic parallels speak at least of the important contacts and migrations between the South Caucasus and the Aegean Sea region in the Bronze Age and offer grounds for the hypothesis on remote relationship between the tribes inhabiting the regions.⁸

Owing to their specific character, Mycenaean texts mention the geographical areas outside their kingdom on a very rare occasion.

Archeological finds make it absolutely clear that the Mycenaean world enjoyed commercial contacts with Phoenicia and Cyprus. This is also attested by the texts where the following adjectives either specify a product or function as proper names of individuals: Phoenician, Phenicese — φοῖνιξ: po-ni-ke-a (KN Ln 1568), po-ni-ke- (PY Ta 714, 722), po-ni-ki-ja/jo (KN);⁹ Cyprian, Cypriot — κύπριος: ku-pi-ri-jo (KN Fh 347, 361, 371, 372, 5446, 5447, Ga 517, 676, 677, Gg 995, K 773, X 468; PY Cn 131, 719, Jn 320, Un 443).¹⁰

Egypt, another important partner of the Aegean world, is represented through an adjective used as a proper name – Egyptian — a₃-ku-pi-ti-jo (KN Db 1105) – Αἰγύπτιος. Presumably, the second name used in the same sense

⁶ Cf. wozee – “work”, which may designate a specific state obligation in the E-class texts.

⁷ R. Plath, *Linear B. Der Neue Pauly (DNP)* 7, 1999, 245ff.

⁸ In detail see: R. Gordeziani, *Mediterranea-Kartvelica*, I-III vol., Tbilisi 2007.

⁹ DMic II, 138sqq.

¹⁰ DMic I, 405.

must have been derived from the Semitic name of Egypt — *mi-sa-ra-jo* (KN F 841).¹¹ Interestingly, ‘Egyptian’ is used only once (or twice) in the Cretan texts. Therefore, the single mentioning of ‘Colchis’ can not serve as a proof to assert that the Cretan Achaeans had no idea about Colchis.

The Achaeans could have been aware of Colchis.

In 1984, Tim Severin demonstrated that a Mycenaean ship could sail against the stream through the Dardanelles and Bosphoros.¹² Besides, the archeological excavations headed by Manfred Korfmann, started in 1988, points to quite intensive movements between the Mediterranean and the Black sea regions in the late Bronze Age.¹³ Apart from the Hittite Empire, which the Achaeans could reach by a shorter cut, in those times there was only one major political entity in the Black Sea region – Colchis. Its name was presumably mentioned for first time in the 12th century B.C. Assyrian texts;¹⁴ however, archeological materials from western Georgia suggest that large political entity was formed as early as the 15th century.¹⁵

Consequently, the Argonaut legend may reflect an actual expedition of the Mycenaean period. Moreover, it includes several indicators that facilitate its dating.

The tradition assigns the Argonauts to the generation of the Trojan heroes’ fathers. There are several ways of dating the Trojan War, and the date ranges between 1334-1135. Out of the proposed versions the most popular one was the dating by Eratosthenes – 1184 B.C., which almost coincides with the date of the fall of Troy VIIa (VII¹⁶ according to the latest classification) as suggested by archeologists. However, the war that could have inspired the Homeric epics should anyway be dated to the 13th century, when Mycenae was a powerful state.¹⁷

Consequently, the Argonauts must have visited Colchis almost by the end of the 14th century B.C. or the start of the 13th century. However, one generation of myths does not always span just 30-40 years. For example, the 400 hundred year long histories of Crete and Mycenae correspond to only three generations of kings, while Tisamenus, the grandson of Agamemnon, fought

¹¹ E. Cline, *Contact and Trade or Colonization? Egypt and the Aegean in the 14th-13th Centuries B.C.* *Minos* 25-26, 1990-1991, 18; *DMic* I, 136, 454.

¹² T. Severin, *The Jason’s Voyage*, London 1985.

¹³ M. Korfmann, *Das homerische Troia war größer – Ergebnisse der Grabungen 1988-1995. Troia. Mythen und Archäologie.* Hrsg. H.D. Galter. Graz, 1997, 83ff.

¹⁴ Г. А. Меликишвили, *Наири-Урарту*, Тбилиси 1954, 22 и слл.

¹⁵ Cf. О. Лордкипанидзе, *Наследие древней Грузии*, Тбилиси 1989, 204 и слл.

¹⁶ M. Korfmann, *Die Arbeiten in Troia/Wilusa* 2003, *Studia Troica* 14, 2004, 5f.

¹⁷ Different dating possibilities are discussed in: L. Gordeziani, *Der Trojanische Krieg in den Linear-B-Texten? Phasis, Greek and Roman Studies*, 8, 2005, 52ff.

against the Dorians in the tenth century B.C. I fully agree with the opinion of F. Schachermeyr, who states that the folk memory has preserved only the names of the distinguished kings and has adjusted them to particular periods.¹⁸ The king to rule pre-Greek Crete before the 15th century B.C. was Minos. Deucalion, mentioned among the Argonauts, reigned in the meantime between the first and the second invasions of the Achaeans (1450-1370 B.C.), while Idomeneus appears to be the ruler of completely Mycenaean Crete (for over a century's period!). We have the same picture in the Mycenae: Pelops must have come to Mycenae from Asia Minor in a war chariot in the middle of the 16th century B.C.¹⁹ The reign of Atreus must cover the first half of the 14th century;²⁰ while the rule of Agamemnon should be anchored in the 13th century B.C. Owing to the literary treatment and systemic approach to the fragments of history, Minos became the father of Achaean Deucalion, Pelops – father of Atreus, and the latter – father of Agamemnon, etc. Literary systematization must have also resulted in the fact that out of the successful campaigns of the 15th-13th centuries B.C. Greeks recalled only the Trojan War, and out of the marine expeditions – the Voyage of the Argonauts. The 'catalogues of heroes' are also connected with these or other famous plots. If a sizeable team of celebrated heroes of the Trojan War does not seem unusual, the participation of so many prominent individuals in the events of comparatively local significance may stir doubts. For example, the presence of many princes and nobles on board a single ship is really surprising, while Heracles looks so unnatural among the Argonauts that he was compelled to leave the ship half way down the voyage. The surviving Argonautica includes other chronological discrepancies as well; Being the native of Iolcus of the Late Bronze Age, Jason must have gone to extremes to marry the daughter of the Corinthian king of the Middle Bronze Age; neither could Medea have become acquainted with yet childless Egeus as the Cretan adventure of his son Theseus should be dated no later than to the early 14th century B.C.

Undoubtedly, as time passed the story of the Argonauts was either enriched with certain details or abridged. The myth probably united the events related to several important expeditions, which is indicated by the homeward route of the Argonauts. It was interlinked with other real or invented stories. As a result, a whole cycle of myths was composed, where it is rather difficult to distinguish the historical core. Here I won't even attempt to reconstruct the

¹⁸ F. Schachermeyr, *Die griechische Rückerinnerung im Lichte neuer Forschungen*, Wien 1983, 36f.

¹⁹ F. Schachermeyr, 106ff.

²⁰ Cf. F. Schachermeyr, *Mykene und das Hethiterreich*, Wien 1986, 161ff.

initial shape of the myth, or to analyze its particular parts; I will dwell only on one aspect of the issue.

Already ancient Greek authors found the deeds of the Argonauts heroic as they were the first Achaeans to penetrate the Black Sea.²¹ A titanic volcanic explosion occurred on the Island of Thera (Santorini) in 1500 B.C. The island was half drawn in the water. The eruption and the accompanying waves and ashes reached Crete as well; the famous Minoan fleet was destroyed, which enabled Mycenae to enter the sea. In the middle of the 15th century, Mycenaean products start to be spread on the territory under Minoan influence (Miletus in Asia Minor, Mellus, Rhodus, Cyprus), which could as well have been accompanied by the spread of the Mycenaean authority in a particular shape. The Mycenaean expansion in the Aegean region is obvious in the 14th century B.C. Mycenae ultimately dominates over Crete, and the Achaeans confront the Hittite Kingdom in Asia Minor and Cyprus.

The earliest Mycenaean ceramic discovered in Troad belong to the same period. This may indicate the start of the Achaean influence over the Black Sea. A ship of the Bronze Age could have sailed against the stream through the Dardanelles and Bosphoros only with the help of the tail-wind. The ships sailing from the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea would stop by the coast of Troy to wait for the tail-wind, which was quite profitable for Trojans. The removal of obstacles on the way to the Black Sea could indeed have become the motivation for assaulting Troy.

Although the number of the ceramic ware discovered on the city site and the coast is not remarkable, and several fragments of the LH II period can be explained merely by the Achaean visit to Troy, the increasing number of Mycenaean products and the traces of the temporary camp of sailors clearly attest that the Black Sea route was not unknown to them. The discovery of Mycenaean ceramics dating back to the period from the second half of 15th century B.C. at the entrance to the Dardanelle suffices to date the first Greek expedition to the Black Sea to the turn of the 14th century B.C. The date coincides with the rule of Deucalion, who represented the first dynasty of the Achaeans on Crete, and the start of the reign of Atreus in Mycenae, which exactly fits the Argonautic campaign.

Thus, in my opinion, this first penetration must have given rise to the myth about the Argonautic voyage.²²

An indirect prove to this assumption are the names found in the Mycenaean texts: Aiaia – a₃-wa-ja: PY En 74/ Eo 160; Aiates – a₃-wa-ta: KN Vc 7612; Athamas – a-ta-ma-ne-u: PY Cn 655; Kretheus – ke-re-te-u: PY Ea

²¹ О. Лордкипанидзе, 215.

²² L. Gordeziani, Zur Datierung des Argonautenzuges, Gs. A. Urushadze, Tbilisi 1999, 22ff.

59 etc.; Amythaon – a-mu-ta-wo: PY Nn 831, KN V 756, TH Ug 9; Iason – i-wa-so: PY Cn 655; Mopsos – mo-qo-so: KN Dc 1381; Lynkeus – ru-ke-wo (-wo-wi-ja): PY Nc 1053.

Out of this list offered by St. Hiller,²³ the first two names are especially interesting for the present research. A low-ranking priest (te-o-ja do-e-ra) Aeaea is presented as a tenant of a land parcel in private ownership.

PY En 74:

.20 pi-ke-re-wo , ko-to-na , ki-ti-me-na , to-so-de , pe-mo GRA 2 T 6

.21 o-da-a₂ , o-na-te-re , e-ke-si , pi-ke-re-wo , ko-to-na

.22 a₃-wa-ja , te-o-jo , do-e-ra , o-na-to , e-ke , to-so-de , pe-mo GRA T 1

"The private plot of Pirkeus, so much seed: 312 l. wheat. Now this is how the tenants hold plots belonging to Pikreus: Aiwaia, servant of the god, holds a lease, so much seed: 12 l. wheat."

PY Eo 160:

.1 pi-ke-re-wo , ko-to-na , ki-ti-me-na to-so-de , pe-mo GRA 2 T 6

.2 a₃-wa-ja , te-o-jo , do-e-ra , e-ke-qe , o-na-to , pa-ro , pi-ke-re-we GRA T 1

"The private plot of Pirkeus, so much seed: 312 l. wheat. Aiwaia, servant of the god, holds a lease from Pirkeus so much seed: 12 l. wheat".²⁴

As concerns Aietes, (a₃-wa-ta), the name is without a context.

We can add to the list of St. Hiller one anthroponym me-de-i-jo (KN B 800 – Μήδειος), a theonym i-pe-me-de-ja (PY Tn 316 – Ἰφιμέδεια), and a Cretan place name ku-ta-to (Kuvtaiton, Kuvtaion together with its derivatives: ku-ta-i-jo, ku-ta-i-si-jo, ku-ta-si-jo, ku-ta-ti-jo – Κυτάιος, Κυταΐσιος, Κυτάϊτιος).²⁵

Of course, neither Cretan and Mycenaean shepherds and landowners were among the Argonauts, nor was Cretan Kutaion the Royal city of Colchis Kutaia/Kutaisi. Anyway, such parallels may speak in favour of the earliest version of the myth.

In view of the above-mentioned material, we may argue that the mentioning of Colchis in the linear B texts should by no means be ruled out, although it should not be regarded as ultimately attested.

²³ St. Hiller, *The Mycenaeans and the Black Sea*. *Thalassa*. L'Egeé préhistorique et la mer, Liège 1991, 214.

²⁴ M. Ventris, J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, 244, 248.

²⁵ DMic I, 412sq.